

Phase Sign-Off Process Guideline

A short process guideline developed by a company whose product life cycle called for team and executive signoffs at the end of project phases and at two other key project checkpoints. It suggests to project managers how they can accomplish the signoffs in a meaningful and efficient way. It also includes up front the one page “proposal” created by project managers there to simplify the phase signoff process to what is documented in the guideline, and an example signoff sheet.

This company included signoffs at the end of each phase in their lifecycle as a way to help make sure:

- The proper work was done in each phase.
- The product and related documentation was at the right readiness and quality level before transition to the next phase.
- All functional groups were aware of the coming phase transition so they could weigh in on whether the product, documentation, etc. being transferred to them for their work in the next phase was truly ready.
- Executives took responsibility for approving the transition to the next phase where more money would likely be spent and perhaps their own functional resources were due to ramp up.

The earlier phase transitions marked important project go/no-go decision points that the company was serious about protecting; they had worked hard to reduce ad hoc project starts and make sure that projects got funded with enough resources and correct priorities, and the early phase transition reviews helped ensure that.

Typically the later phase transitions marked the next step up in effort, with more team members coming on board to get ready for builds or launch, for instance. The transitions also usually marked a point at which expenditures beyond labor would also increase, due to investing in more test equipment, spending for prototype fabrication, etc. Therefore these later transitions were important for a sanity check on readiness to go spend that next level of money.

Why did they need to create a special guideline? In the monthly project manager lunches, an issue with the signoff process was raised by multiple PMs. The effort to get signoffs had increased prohibitively. Executives were busy and on the road with customers a great deal, and scheduling a timely signoff meeting with the needed executives (what their original process called for) became impossible. In addition, the earlier process had called for all the phase deliverables to be made available for review, and the effect was that no one felt they had time for the process. The benefits of it in terms of sanity check and executive awareness of phase transitions (which often meant their own resources were next up on the project in the coming phase) were getting lost. So several PMs recommended a revised signoff process, and this guideline was created to explain it to all 30 project managers and functional managers.

The proposal they created to suggest the signoff process change is presented first, followed by the resulting signoff process guideline.

1. **Review the proposal and guideline for applicability to your projects.** Do you do phase signoffs? If so, consider whether you have any issues with efficiency or effectiveness of the process and what ideas this company's situation might provide for improving your own. If you don't have a signoff process, consider this company's reasons for having one, and whether your projects could benefit from any of their approach.
2. **If you feel you need such a process and guideline, involve active project managers** to suggest what the process should be, so that it's a meaningful exercise at the end of each phase, not a paper exercise.
3. **Document your own guideline, and review it** with the executives and managers and team members who would be signing off. Adjust it for additional suggestions for effectiveness and efficiency.
4. **Publish it to those who will be involved.**
5. **After using it for phase transitions, review results with the team(s)** – how well did it work? Adjust if necessary.

Proposal: Change to Company Phase Signoff Process

Summary: This proposal was prompted by two concerns:

- Multiple Project Managers have complained that VP- and Director-level phase signoffs are largely a formality, i.e., they represent no true check of readiness by those signing.
- We have become concerned that the true purpose of phase signoffs has gotten lost. Project Managers worry more about having a binder and walking around a sign-off sheet, than truly checking the quality of the team's work in the project phase. The understanding of the deliverables value has gotten lost in emotion about "having to do all of this documentation for the sign-off."

We propose that we change the sign-off requirements as follows:

1. Executives (VP-/Director-level) will sign only the following four company-level project "decision points":

Decision Point	Phase	Deliverable to be signed by Executives
Fund Phase 2 work	End of Phase 1	#1.5, New Product Engineering Request
Fund/Launch the project	End of Phase 2	#2.22, New Project Launch Announcement signed off. Vision, Milestones list, and resource plan attached.
Chicken tests passed, OK to proceed	Phase 4	#4.8, Critical Design Review (CDR) results signed-off Note: Signed by VP Development
OK to deliver to customer(s)	Phase 7	#7.4, First Customer Shipment (FCS) readiness signed off.

2. All phase signoffs/exits will be simplified and signed by the team as follows:

Deliverables	Team member signatures	What is attached	Purpose
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Deliverables	Team member signatures	What is attached	Purpose
#1.5 NPER #2.22 NPLA #3.22 OK to Develop #4.8 CDR #4.29 Release to Alpha #5.22 Release to Beta #6.15 Release to Manufacturing #7.4 FCS	Cross-functional team member from each major area. The responsible functional director and the Product Champion	The list of deliverables done for the phase. The final design review or test results review minutes from that phase.	Sanity checkpoint where a team member can raise a flag if certain tasks or deliverables aren't yet done acceptably. Entire team has responsibility for saying, "Yes, we did a good job and we can go on."

PROJECT PHASE SIGNOFF GUIDELINE

Procedure for Sign-offs that Involve All Executives (VP-level):

Phase	Deliverable to be signed by Executives	Decision Point
End of Phase 1	#1.5 New Product Engineering Request (NPER)	Fund Phase 2 work
End of Phase 2	#2.22 New Project Launch Announcement	Fund/Launch the project
During Phase 4	#4.8 Critical Design Review (CDR) results (VP Development signs)	Chicken tests passed, OK to proceed
During Phase 7	#7.4 First Customer Shipment (FCS) readiness	OK to deliver to customer

Follow these steps when you are ready to get the sign-offs for #1.5, #2.22, and #7.4.

1. Think and plan ahead. It's recommended that you pre-brief or pre-sell particular executives ahead of the actual signoff timeframe as needed. There is ample lead-time ahead of the actual phase transition signoff – you know when it's coming! – to ensure that they've been reading status reports, attending the monthly project reviews, etc. and do not have any issues. (And if they do, of course you want ample warning to address them.) So plan ahead for any necessary special conversations. This will also make it much easier to catch the executives with plenty of time to spare.

2. Prepare sign-off sheet. Attach a list of the deliverables done for this phase. Also attach the following documentation. NOTE: If you're doing ahead-of-signoff exec briefings, this information can be draft – even if it's not quite done it can be good enough to communicate what the executive needs to be briefed on.
 - #1.5 NPER—Include #1.5 NPER sign-off form filled out including “time and budget to evaluate” information. Optional to attach deliverable #1.4 for more detail.
 - #2.22—New Project Launch Announcement: Include #2.22 NPLA sign-off form, filled out. Attach Project Vision, Milestones list, Team roles list.
 - #7.4—First Customer Ship Readiness: Include #7.4 FCS sign-off form, filled out.
3. Get your team members (at least cross-functional representatives), your Product Champion, and your responsible Director, to sign the form first. Review the form and related documentation in a team meeting. Use the related checklist to challenge yourselves as to whether the team is really done with this phase or this project checkpoint. Make sure that the signature is really serving as a team sanity check that you did a good job in this phase.
4. Give the documentation including the partially signed form to Judy for distribution to the executives at least one day ahead of when you want to get their signatures. A few days ahead of time is recommended.

NOTE 1: You are not required to walk the entire binder of phase documents around for these sign-offs. This procedure lists the minimum documentation you should take to the executives. However, they are always welcome to look at the other deliverables in the binder if they desire.

NOTE 2: You may still walk the sign-off form around to the executives, but to get the signatures most efficiently, all at once, use John's [the president's] Monday morning staff meeting. But see also the note in #1 about doing any pre-briefs.

5. Call (do not email) George (VP Development) on the Friday before the meeting you wish to attend John's Monday staff meeting. This is the best place to get all the executives at once. Even when they're traveling a lot, they try to be here for this meeting, or at least call in.
6. Prepare one or two slides that will allow you to brief the executives on the project and the rationale for proceeding to the next phase within 5-10 minutes.
7. Attend John's meeting at 8 a.m. the following Monday, make your presentation, answer questions, and get signatures on the spot.
8. Distribute the signed form to the team and the executives.

Follow these steps for #4.8. Only George H.'s [VP Development] signature is required.

1. Have George witness the system chicken test [test of partially integrated system that shows that all major technical risks have been conquered].
2. Hold your Critical Design Review (CDR) meeting, then publish the minutes of that meeting.
3. Fill out #4.8 Critical Design Review sign-off form, and attach minutes from CDR meeting.
4. Get your team members (at least cross-functional representatives), your Product Champion, and your responsible director to sign the CDR sign-off form.
5. Schedule an appointment with George to review the results and recommendations and get sign-off.
6. Distribute the signed form to the team and executives.

B. Procedure for Getting Remaining Sign-offs

(Signoffs that do not involve all executives)

Deliverables	Team member signatures	What is attached	Purpose
#3.22 OK to Develop #4.29 Release to Alpha #5.22 Release to Beta #6.15 Release to Manufacturing	Cross-functional team member from each major area. The responsible director and Product Champion	The list of deliverables done for the phase. The final design review or test results review minutes from that phase.	Sanity checkpoint where a team member can raise a flag if certain tasks or deliverables aren't yet done acceptably. Entire team has responsibility for saying, "Yes, we did a good job and we can go on."

Follow these steps when you are ready to get the sign-offs above.

NOTE: A key decision was made that each team should decide at the beginning of a phase which deliverables as a minimum must be completed before exiting the phase.

1. Prepare sign-off sheet.
 - Attach a list of the deliverables done for this phase. (Check it against your minimum list to exit the phase.)

- Also attach the design review or test results review minutes from that phase.
2. Review the forms and test results etc. in a team meeting. Use the phase signoff checklist to challenge yourselves as to whether the team is really done with this phase. Make sure that the signature is really serving as a team sanity check that you did a good job in this phase.
 3. Get your team members (at least cross-functional representatives), your Product Champion, and your overseeing Director, to sign the form – if no issues, then right there in the team meeting. If there are issues, adjourn to resolve them, then get back together to do another review and do the signoff.
 4. In the next monthly project status review with the executives, report that you got the phase sign-off.

Example Signoff Form: First Customer Ship Approval

When the team is ready to allow initial customer shipments, the FCS approval form should be used to make this momentous event official, and ensure that the entire cross-functional team weighs in on readiness to send the product to customers.

First Customer Ship (FCS) Approval Form

Product: _____	Date: _____
Team Notes, Recommendations, and Approval: _____	

Pilot Run Status/Completion Date: _____	
Documentation Status (User Manual, Release Notes, Product Configuration Guidelines, etc.): or attach summary	

Beta or Acceptance Test Results Summary: _____	
_____, attach results	
Recommendation to approve FCS: _____	

Typical Cross-Functional Team Signatures

Project Manager: _____	Date: _____
New Product Introduction Engineer: _____	Date: _____
Product Manager: _____	Date: _____
SQA Manager: _____	Date: _____
Quality Manager: _____	Date: _____
Customer Service: _____	Date: _____

Additional Team Signatures (as needed)

_____	Date: _____
_____	Date: _____
_____	Date: _____
_____	Date: _____

Typical Executive Signatures:

VP Development: _____	Date: _____
VP Data Services: _____	Date: _____
VP Operations: _____	Date: _____
VP Sales/Marketing: _____	Date: _____
VP Finance: _____	Date: _____

Administrative Information

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